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Statement submitted by Educational Foundation for African Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued *without formal editing*.

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Statement

Educational Foundation for African Women has her primary focus on girl child education in Africa. This Non-Governmental Organization is also concerned about violence against girls and women among other objectives. Educational Foundation for African Women has contributed significantly to girl child education in various parts of Africa and advocated for stern disciplinary actions to address the issue of violence, especially domestic violence, which most often affects the girl child adversely.

The enunciation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action forms a great landmark in the global search for a gender balanced, development oriented and rancour free society. Virtually all important areas of the gender spectrum of activities and relations are touched by this vital document. It is twenty years down the road towards the establishment of the envisaged ideal global society where gender equity, freedom and harmony form the basis of sustainable development. The scorecard has been quite impressive in some areas while in several others it has fallen short of expectation.

It is the candid submission of Educational Foundation for African Women that within the period under review there has been a remarkable increase in the enrolment of girls in schools in Africa. Some areas appear to have a higher enrolment of girls than others. In Nigeria, for instance, while the girl child's school enrolment in the southern states has risen by over 80 per cent, in the northern states the rise has been as low as 20 per cent. However the critical issue is the retention rate. Many of these girls do not finish their secondary/high school. They drop out for a number of reasons:

- Poverty
- Insecurity
- Teenage Pregnancy
- Early Marriage and harmful/religious practices

Poverty

In Africa more often than not over 60 per cent of the populace live in abject poverty. Even in those countries that have, in recent times achieved some economic breakthrough, the resources are so inequitably distributed that the average family does not benefit from them. While a class of the society can afford to send their children (male and female alike) abroad to study most others cannot afford to send theirs to basic public schools. It is a known fact in Africa that when resources are limited the average family gets the girls to step aside for their male siblings to continue with their education.

Insecurity

In war torn or conflict ridden countries, the girl child is usually hit the worst. She is kidnapped, raped or killed by ravaging "rebels" "freedom fighters" "Religious fundamentalists" or whatever name tag they are identified by. The kidnapping of over two hundred school girls in Chibok, Bornu State Nigeria in April 2014 is possibly the most horrific of such massive abuse of the girl child's right to

education. This sad saga that led to the #BRINGBACKOURGIRLS campaign has drawn international condemnation for the perpetrators.

Teenage pregnancy

More and more teenage school girls are getting pregnant and dropping out of school. Some of them are victims of rape while others fall prey to the enticement of a novel, maverick set of gangsters who lure them into pregnancy, promising to buy their babies off them at stupendous amounts of money. The latter group consists of girls, usually from poverty stricken families. This has resulted in a new type of trafficking — trafficking in babies. Some buildings are clandestinely used to harbour teenage pregnant girls till they put to bed and their babies taken off them and sold off. Our research also shows that some of them get into the hands of ritual murderers. The secret buildings where the pregnant girls are kept are called "baby factories". There are several instances of this in Nigeria and possibly other neighbouring countries.

Early marriage and harmful cultural/religious practices

Across Africa, early marriage for girls is a serious menace truncating the education and enlightenment of these girls and feminizing poverty. This practice is often attached to religious and cultural practices. Some claim it is germane for girls to be married off as soon as possible "before they become corrupted". This is the same reason they adduce for promoting Female Genital Mutilation. They claim it is to guard against promiscuity for the girls. For many other cases poverty is the culprit, as parents are only too eager to do away with another mouth to feed and while doing so also rakes in some resources in the form of bride price.

Violence against women and girls

As earlier noted another area of work for us is the campaign against violence against women and girls. It is regrettable that violence against girls and women is on the increase. It has in fact become radicalized. Added to beating are several other terrible acts. Girlfriends or wives are bathed with acid to show discontent. Rape now is not only a weapon of war but is also used as a "casual" display of bestiality. Girls as young as three or five years are raped by men they look up to for care, comfort and protection.

The situation in many African countries is that these crimes are hardly ever punished. Most of these countries have either signed or ratified the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women but unfortunately have not domesticated it in their countries. For the locals, issues like rape, wife battery etc. are waived off as "domestic" not needing any elaborate attention of security agencies if any. Luckily, quite a number of Non-Governmental Organizations have intervened to draw attention to the injustice and the violation of women's rights, even if they are not able to obtain a sentence for the culprit.

Recommendations

The Educational Foundation for African Women recommends to the Commission on the Status of Women and governments:

- The security of schools be made a priority globally but especially in Africa. Security must be ensured for schools. It was learnt that the school from which the Chibok girls were abducted had no fencing whatsoever. We should work towards having schools, especially girls' schools "garrisoned" as it were. Measures should also be put in place to ensure the safety of the teachers. Every arm of the government, Federal, State and the Local Government Councils should be fully/actively involved in these processes. International support would provide a significant boost to the nations' efforts.

- Massive public enlightenment campaigns be embarked upon in various countries, especially the developing countries in respect of reproductive health for girls and women and the consequences of ignorance or neglect of this crucial aspect of our lives. There is need for increased public enlightenment in various societies especially in Africa on reproductive health issues to curb the escalating rate of teenage pregnancy in secondary schools. The "Baby factory" malaise should not only be condemned but should be clamped down on. I feel very happy to report that in November 2013, we led an extensive campaign against the sale of babies and child pornography in Aba, Abia State in the southeast of Nigeria. The campaign included media broadcasts of jingles in both the local language, Igbo and in English, rallies and lectures. The outing was very successful as shortly after it the Abia state government demolished a big private hospital in Aba that had allegedly been serving as a "baby factory".

- Expedite action on the domestication of the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in all the countries that have so far signed or ratified it in their various countries. Many a time many United Nations treaties, conventions etc. are signed or ratified by various governments but all this remain on paper and are hardly ever implemented or domesticated in their respective countries. This posture must change to achieve progress in the desired goals.

- Constant/persistent efforts be made to boost their economies and ensure to a large extent a fairly equitable distribution of resources, so the level of poverty could be substantially reduced as poverty is responsible for a high number of cases of out of school girls.

- Efforts be made to discourage early marriage for the girl child in their countries as this practice keeps girls and women perpetually in bondage of ignorance and poverty.